

Valid: Jan. - Mar. 2006
Issue Date: January 11, 2006
Complete Update: April 5, 2006

2006 PRELIMINARY FIRE SEASON OUTLOOK

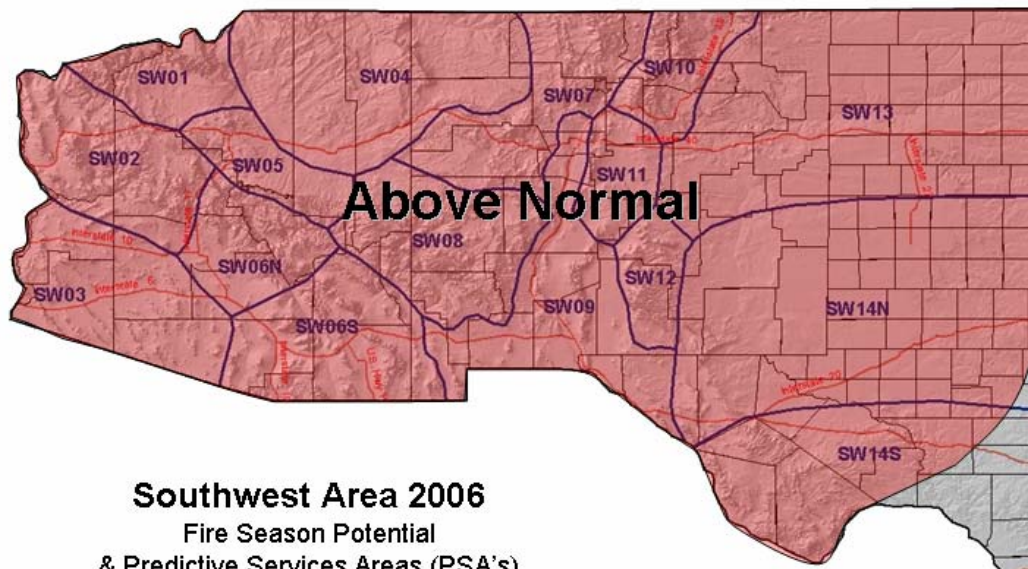
PRODUCT INTENT

The intent of the **preliminary** fire season outlook is to provide a scientifically based early look at factors affecting the potential severity of the primary Southwest Area fire season, normally April through July. This involves a combination of quantitative and subjective analytical and forecast methodologies.

SUMMARY

The overall 2006 Southwest Area fire season will be above normal in terms of the Geographic Area's impact on national firefighting resources. This will be characterized by an early and active season in all fuel regimes across most of the Geographic Area, with above normal potential for initial attack and large fire development. The potential for early season timber fires will be particularly high.

- Abundance of carryover fine herbaceous fuels from the wet 2004-2005 winter.
- Significant precipitation deficit since the weak 2005 monsoon, and nearly non-existent mountain snowpack.
- Forecast of continued warm and dry conditions through May.
- Lower elevation, lighter fuel types susceptible to fire through the winter.
- Mid to high elevation, heavier fuel types to support significant fire activity by April.
- Moisture to increase east of the continental divide by late May/early June.
- Monsoon expected to begin early or on time and provide ample rainfall.
- Fire activity to remain significant through June into July, mainly west of the continental divide.



POSSIBLE PREPAREDNESS EFFORTS

The following are considerations for fire management interests in light of the developing nature of the upcoming fire season:

- Bring on seasonal resources early and complete training and preparedness/safety reviews as early as possible.
 - Pre-position additional aviation and initial attack resources as early as March.
 - Ensure firefighting personnel are aware that significant fire activity will continue in the fine fuels as in 2005, but that fires will have the potential to advance much more readily into the brush and timber fuels.
 - Ensure NFDRS pocketcards are updated and certified.
 - Ensure all NFDRS stations are entering timely and accurate daily observations and otherwise functioning to NFDRS standards by February 1st.
-

FIRE ACTIVITY ASSESSMENT

- In terms of current and forecast conditions, the year 1996 is the most similar to what we expect in 2006.
- The 1995/1996 winter precipitation pattern was similar to what's occurring now, and the previous year was fairly wet.
- 1996 had a dry and windy spring, with significant large fire activity in timber fuel types in April and May. (Dome - 16,774 acres, Santa Fe NF; Hondo – 7,651 acres, Carson NF)
- Over 5800 fires and 350,000 acres were burned during 1996, the bulk of which occurred prior to July 1st.
- The first three months (January-March) of 1996 had several large fires, ranging in size from 250 to 10,000 acres.
- 1996 had 21 large fires which required one or more Type I or II Incident Management Team be assigned, compared to the average of 14.
- The amount of carryover fine herbaceous fuels was less in 1996 than it is now in early 2006.
- **2006 is shaping up to be a very active, early and intense fire season on the scope of what occurred from January through June, 1996.**

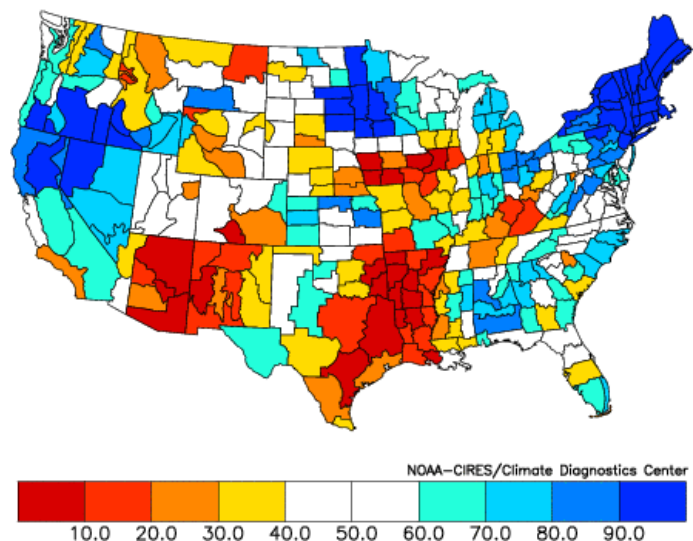
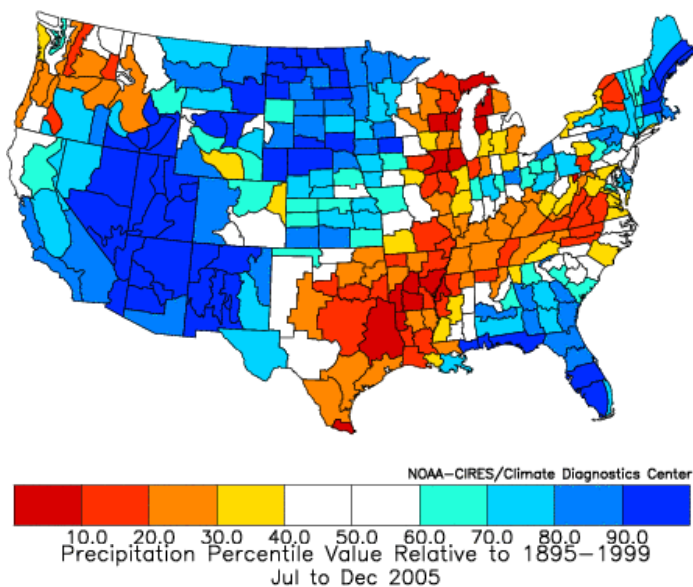
1996 FIRE SEASON STATISTICS (January – June*)

Southwest Area	Total Fires	Total Acres
Total Fires & Acres	3,000	242,371
Average ('90-'05)	2,289	206,822
Median ('90-'05)	2,316	127,154
% of Average	131%	117%
% of Median	130%	191%

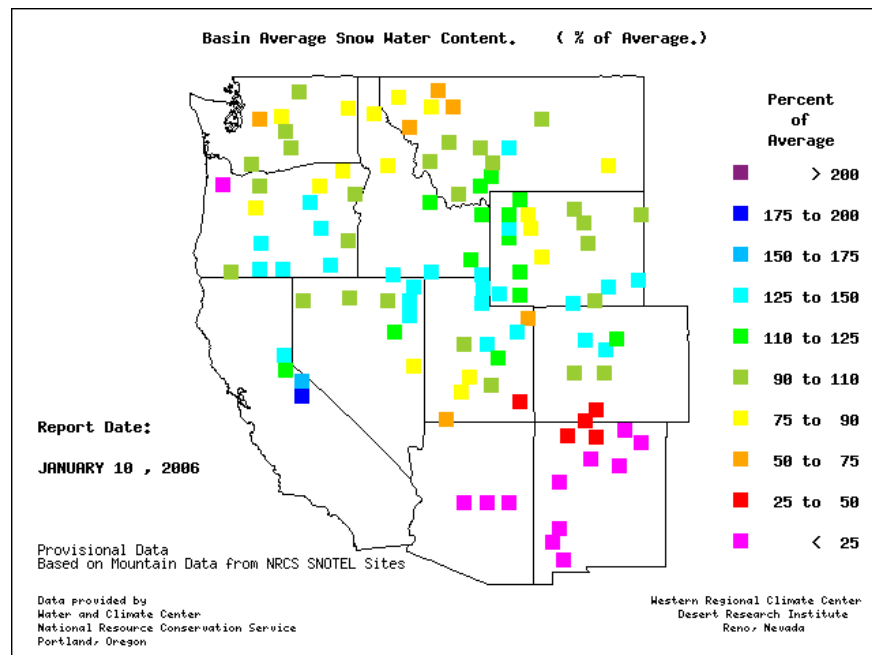
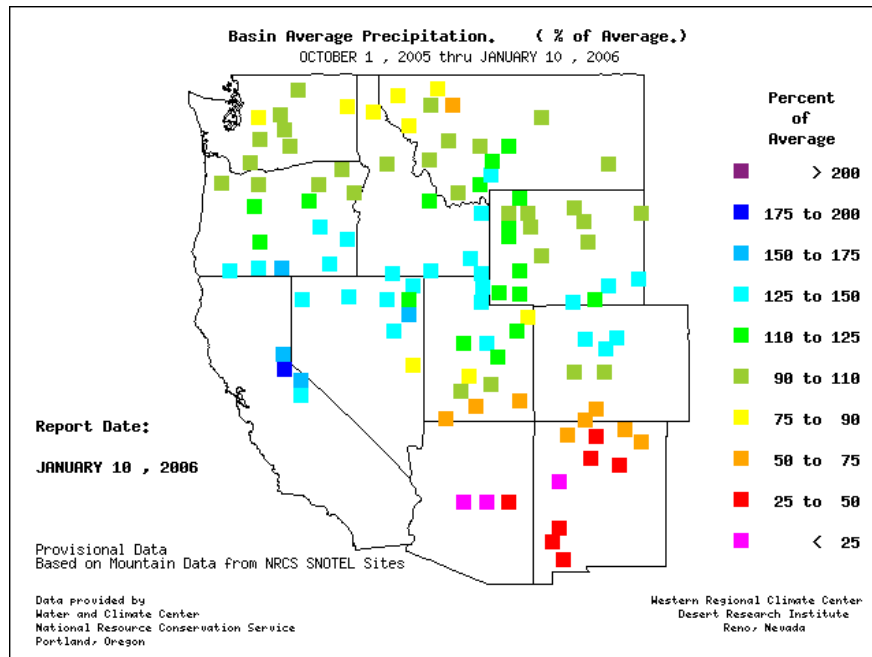
* Note: 1996 fire statistics were significantly impacted by the remnants of a tropical storm which provided season ending rainfall across much of New Mexico and west Texas in mid June. Only fire activity from January through June is provided for comparison due to the unlikelihood of such an event occurring again in 2006.

SUPPORTING INPUT DATA

Precipitation Percentile Value Relative to 1895–1999
Jan to Jun 2005



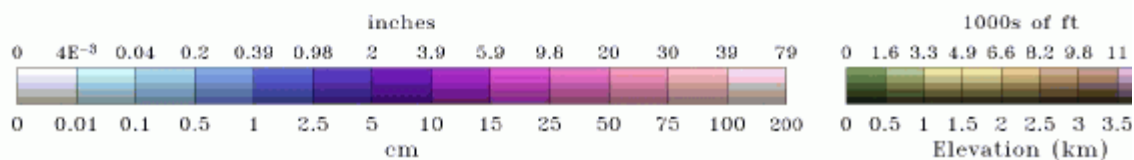
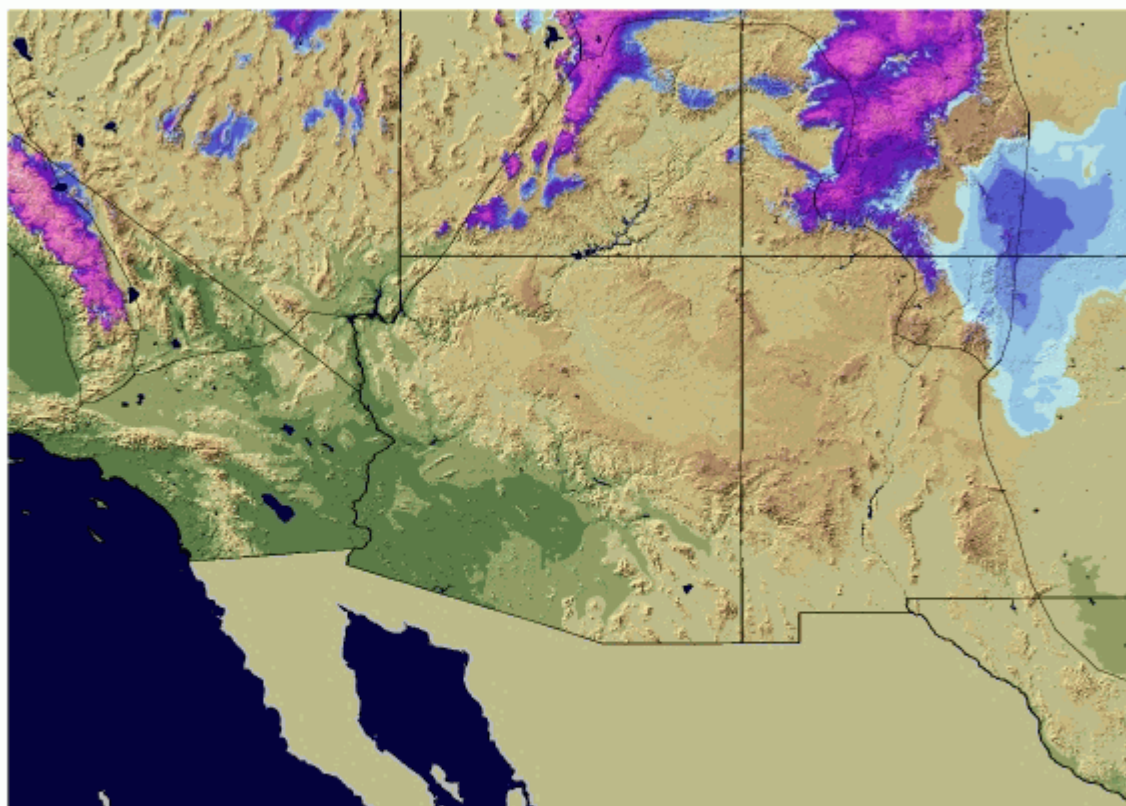
2005 precipitation as a percentile distribution relative to that received for the same time frame during the years 1895–2000. (A value of 20 indicates that only 20% of years from 1895–2000 were drier for the same months indicated). The two graphics show the relatively "above normal" moisture of Jan. - Jun., followed by a rather dry summer through early winter period. The graphs depict the present situation in the region. Various grass and brush species experienced active growth during the first half of 2005. Now, due to the lack of moisture in the past six months through the present, timber and higher elevation fuels are drying and will combine with abundant finer fuel types for an active 2006 fire season.



Basin average precipitation for the water year (starting Oct. 1) and current basin average snow water content. These indicate both below normal seasonal precipitation and lack of any significant snowpack. These factors combined support an active fire season across the southwest at all elevations ranges.

Snow Water Equivalent

2006-01-10 06

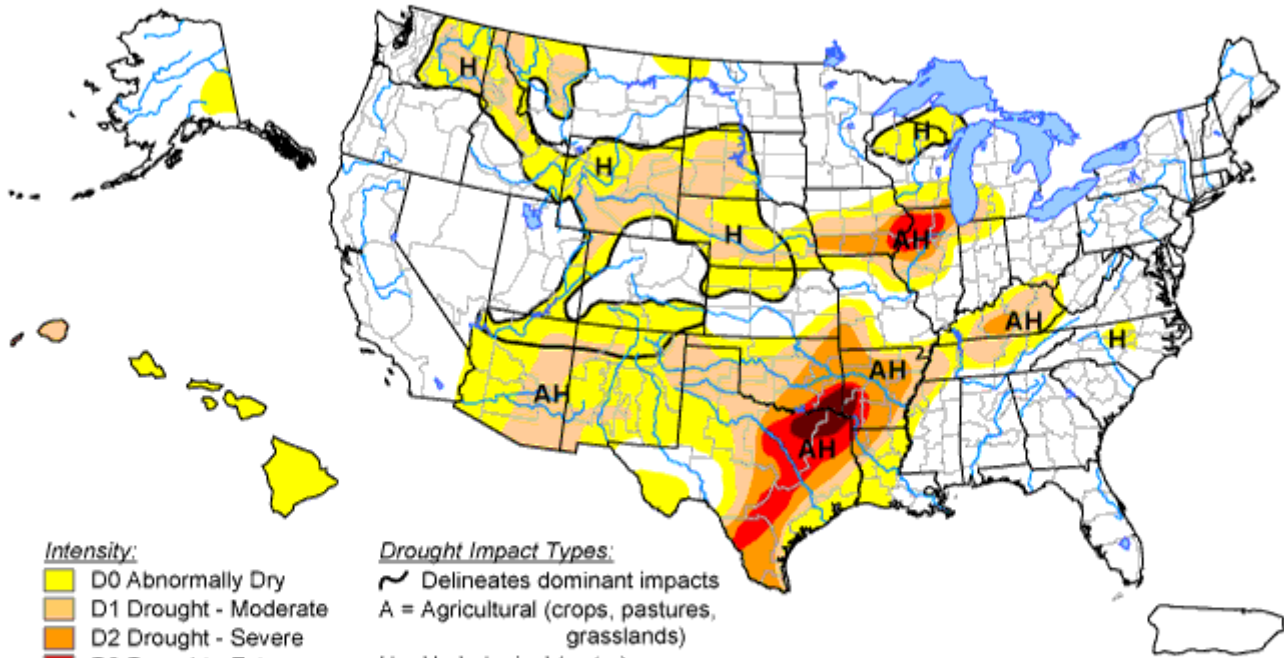


Snow water equivalent image showing extent of areal snow cover across the Southwest Area as of early January. The recent warmer and drier conditions across the southwest and the lack of storm systems have lead to a nearly non-existent snowpack through early January.

U.S. Drought Monitor

January 3, 2006

Valid 7 a.m. EST



Intensity:

- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Drought - Moderate
- D2 Drought - Severe
- D3 Drought - Extreme
- D4 Drought - Exceptional

Drought Impact Types:

- Delineates dominant impacts
- A = Agricultural (crops, pastures, grasslands)
- H = Hydrological (water)

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. See accompanying text summary for forecast statements.

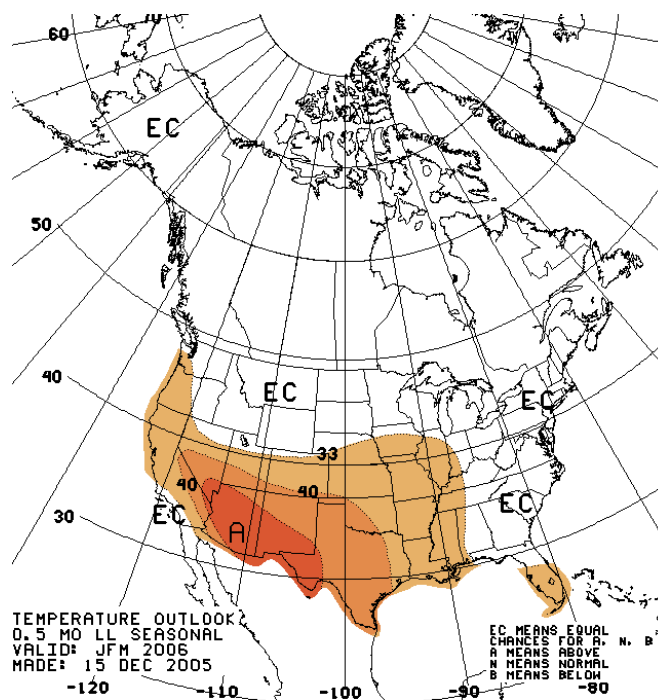
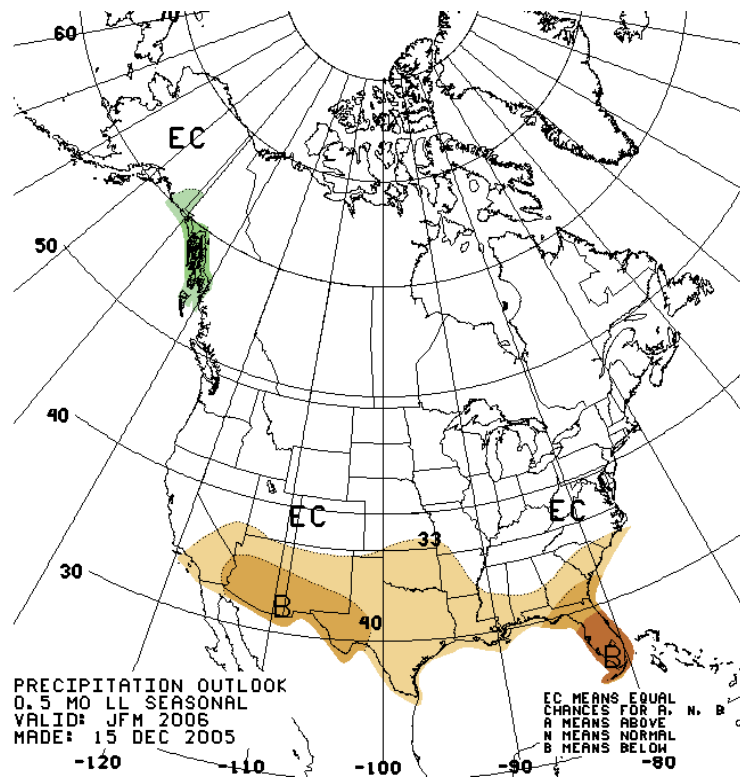
<http://drought.unl.edu/dm>



Released Thursday, January 5, 2006

Author: Douglas Le Comte, CPC/NOAA

Most recent U.S. Drought Monitor image showing significant portions of the Southwest Area as Abnormally Dry or in Moderate hydrological (long term) drought as the result of a multi-year precipitation deficit. Long term drought acts to increase dead fuel loadings and, depending on more recent conditions, can lead to unusually low fuel moisture values in both live and dead fuels. Of note is that areas of eastern Arizona and western New Mexico are in a more elevated drought condition.



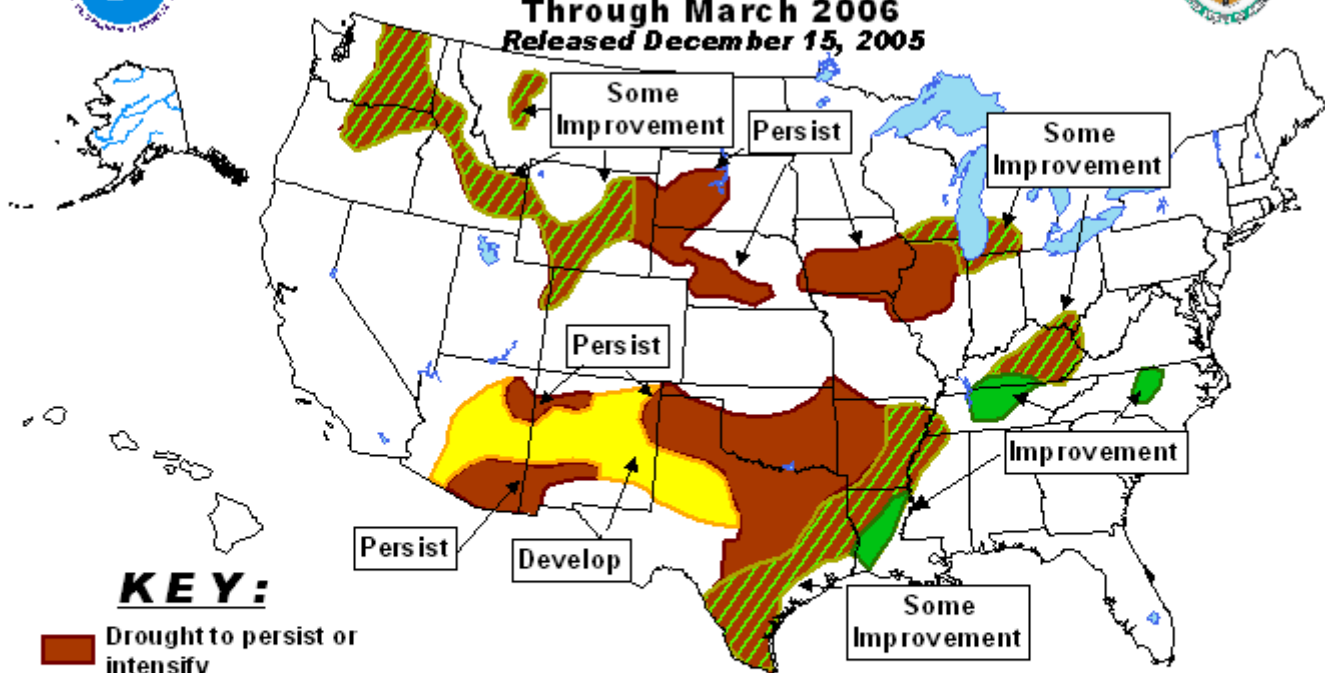
Outlook for the months of January-February-March from the Climate Prediction Center, showing relatively hot and dry conditions forecast for the entire southwestern U.S. A developing La Nina episode is playing a role in inhibiting storm systems from affecting the region. Precipitation is expected to remain below to much below normal through spring.



U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook

Through March 2006

Released December 15, 2005



KEY:

-  Drought to persist or intensify
-  Drought ongoing, some improvement
-  Drought likely to improve, impacts ease
-  Drought development likely

Depicts general, large-scale trends based on subjectively derived probabilities guided by numerous indicators, including short- and long-range statistical and dynamical forecasts. Short-term events -- such as individual storms -- cannot be accurately forecast more than a few days in advance, so use caution if using this outlook for applications -- such as crops -- that can be affected by such events. "Ongoing" drought areas are approximated from the Drought Monitor (D1 to D4). For weekly drought updates, see the latest Drought Monitor map and text. NOTE: the green improvement areas imply at least a 1-category improvement in the Drought Monitor intensity levels, but do not necessarily imply drought elimination.

U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook showing the effects of winter and forecast early spring conditions on the current drought situation as shown earlier by the U.S. Drought Monitor.

Current drought conditions across much of the Southwest Area are expected to worsen through March, which supports the much increased probability of a region-wide severe fire season.

Predictive Services Group
Southwest Coordination Center